Increased Sensitivity to Testicular Toxicity of Transplacental Benzo[a]pyrene Exposure in Male Glutamate Cysteine Ligase Modifier Subunit Knockout (Gclm–/–) Mice

Brooke N. Nakamura,*†1 Isaac Mohar,*2 Gregory W. Lawson,‡ Mabel M. Cortés,§ Yvonne D. Hoang,*3 Laura Ortiz,* Bogdan A. Rau,* Lisa A. McConnachie,† Terrance J. Kavanagh,‡ and Ulrike Luderer §4

*Department of Medicine, University of California-Irvine, Irvine, California 92617; †Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195-4695; ‡Division of Laboratory Animal Medicine, University of California-Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California 90095; and §Department of Developmental and Cell Biology, University of California-Irvine, Irvine, California 92617

1Present address: Gynecologic Oncology, University of California-Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90095.
2Present address: Seattle Biomedical Research Institute, Seattle, WA 98109.
3Present address: Reproductive Medicine, University of California-San Diego, La Jolla, CA 92093.
4To whom correspondence should be addressed at Center for Occupational and Environmental Health, 5201 California Avenue, Suite 100, Irvine, CA 92617.

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Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), like benzo[a]pyrene (BaP), are ubiquitous environmental pollutants formed by the incomplete combustion of organic materials. The tripeptide glutathione (GSH) is a major antioxidant and is important in detoxification of PAH metabolites. Mice null for the modifier subunit of glutamate cysteine ligase (Gclm), the rate-limiting enzyme in GSH synthesis, have decreased GSH concentrations. We investigated the effects of Gclm deletion alone on male fertility and spermatogenesis and its effect on the sensitivity of male embryos to the transplacental testicular toxicity of BaP. Gclm–/– males had dramatically decreased testicular and epididymal GCL enzymatic activity and total GSH concentrations compared with Gclm+/+ littermates. Ratios of reduced to oxidized GSH were significantly increased in Gclm–/– testes. GSH reductase enzymatic activity was increased in Gclm–/– epididymides. We observed no changes in fertility, testicular weights, testicular sperm head counts, or testicular histology and subtle changes in cauda epididymal sperm counts, motility, and morphology in Gclm–/– compared with Gclm+/+ males. Prenatal exposure to BaP from gestational day 7 to 16 was dose dependently associated with significantly decreased testicular and epididymal weights, testicular and epididymal sperm counts, and with vacuolated seminiferous tubules at 10 weeks of age. Gclm–/– males exposed prenatally to BaP had greater decreases in testicular weights, testicular sperm head counts, epididymal sperm counts, and epididymal sperm motility than Gclm+/+ littermates. These results show no effects of Gclm deletion alone on male fertility and testicular spermatogenesis and subtle epididymal effects but support increased sensitivity of Gclm–/– males to the transplacental testicular toxicity of BaP.

Key Words: glutathione; GCLM; PAH; benzo[a]pyrene; spermatogenesis; developmental toxicity.

Reactive oxygen species (ROS), such as superoxide anion radical, hydrogen peroxide, and hydroxyl radical, are formed as byproducts of the normal cellular processes, oxidative phosphorylation and gonadal and adrenal steroidogenesis (Hanukoglu, 2006). In addition, spermatozoa may contain a membrane-bound NADPH oxidase that generates superoxide anion radical (Banfi et al., 2001; de Lamirande et al., 1997; Drevet, 2006). Low levels of ROS are necessary for sperm capacitation, the process by which sperm become capable of fertilizing an oocyte, and for the acrosome reaction, which enables the sperm to penetrate the zona pellucida of the oocyte and fuse with its plasma membrane (Baker and Aitken, 2005). On the other hand, oxidative stress in spermatozoa is associated with male infertility, due to impairment of sperm motility and, at higher levels, decreased sperm viability (Baker and Aitken, 2005; de Lamirande et al., 1997). Spermatozoa are particularly susceptible to oxidative damage due to large amounts of polyunsaturated fatty acids in their cell membranes, which can be oxidized in the presence of ROS (Baker and Aitken, 2005; de Lamirande et al., 1997; Griveau and Le Lannou, 1997).

Glutathione (GSH), the most abundant intracellular non-protein thiol, is present in cells at millimolar concentrations and is an important intracellular antioxidant. GSH has numerous functions, including reduction of hydrogen peroxide and lipid peroxides as a cofactor for GSH peroxidases, detoxification of electrophilic toxicants as a cofactor for glutathione-S-transferases (GSTs), regulation of protein function, and regulation of nucleotide metabolism (Dalton et al., 2004; Franco and Cidlowski, 2009). GSH is synthesized in two ATP-dependent reactions. The first, rate-limiting reaction is catalyzed by GCL, a heterodimer composed of a catalytic (GCLC) and
a modifier (GCLM) subunit. Gclc and Gclm are ubiquitously expressed, including in the testis and epididymis (Dalton et al., 2004; Giordano et al., 2006; Kendig et al., 2011; McConnachie et al., 2007; Nakamura et al., 2011; Yang et al., 2002). Gclc null mice die during embryonic development (Dalton et al., 2000, 2004; Shi et al., 2000). Gclm null mice survive and reproduce but have greatly reduced tissue levels of GSH (Dalton et al., 2004; Giordano et al., 2006; McConnachie et al., 2007; Yang et al., 2002). Female Gclm−/− mice have greatly decreased fertility due to preimplantation embryonic mortality (Nakamura et al., 2011). Because GSH and GSH-dependent enzymes have been shown to be important in certain aspects of sperm development, such as proteamine substitution and midbody structure (Bertelsmann et al., 2007; Kaneko et al., 2002; Li et al., 1989; Maiorino et al., 2005; Schneider et al., 2009), we hypothesized that Gclm−/− male mice would have reduced fertility compared with their wild-type littermates.

Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are ubiquitous environmental pollutants found in air pollution, cooked foods, and mainstream and sidestream tobacco smoke. Human biomonitoring data demonstrate that essentially 100% of the U.S. population is exposed to PAHs (Li et al., 2008). PAHS, including benzo[α]pyrene (BaP), are known testicular toxicants in adults and embryos (Ford and Huggins, 1963; Jensen et al., 1963; MacKenzie and Angevine, 1981). BaP treatment of adult male rats and mice decreased testicular and epididymal weights, testicular DNA synthesis, and sperm counts (Ford and Huggins, 1963; Revel et al., 2001). Treatment of pregnant mice with BaP dose dependently decreased fertility and damaged seminiferous tubules in the adult male offspring (MacKenzie and Angevine, 1981). PAHs in tobacco smoke have been implicated in the decreased fertility and semen abnormalities observed in men who smoke and in men exposed to particulate air pollution (Rubes et al., 1998, 2005, 2007); however, no human studies have examined the effects of transplacental exposure to PAHs on male reproductive function. In addition, no studies have investigated genetic factors that may modulate sensitivity to the transplacental male reproductive toxicity of PAHs.

PAHs require metabolic activation in order to exert toxicity (Xue and Warshawsky, 2005). Prostaglandin-endoperoxide synthases are likely responsible for bioactivation of PAHs in the developing embryo because expression of most cytochrome P450 enzymes is generally low until after birth (Juchau, 1989; Juchau et al., 1998; Rich and Boobis, 1997; Wells et al., 2009). Prostaglandin-endoperoxide synthases oxidize PAHs to free radical intermediates, which can initiate ROS generation (Wells et al., 2009). During mouse development, GCL expression and GSH synthesis by the embryo are present from the blastocyst stage (Stover et al., 2000). GSH-mediated detoxification of ROS produced as a result of PAH metabolism may therefore represent an important line of defense against PAH-induced developmental toxicity.

In view of the importance of GSH in sperm development, in maintaining cellular redox status, and in detoxifying reactive metabolites of BaP, we hypothesized that gonadal and reproductive tract oxidative stress in male Gclm null mice during development and adulthood results in abnormal spermatogenesis and decreased fertility. We further hypothesized that male Gclm null embryos are more susceptible to the testicular toxicity of in utero BaP exposure than their Gclm+/+ littermates.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Animals. Gclm null mice were generated by disrupting the Gclm gene by replacing exon 1 with a β-galactosidase/neomycin phosphotransferase fusion minigene (Giordano et al., 2006; McConnachie et al., 2007). The mice have been backcrossed eight times onto a C57BL/6J genetic background (B6.129-Gclmnull; hereafter referred to as Gclm−/−). Mice for these experiments were generated at the University of California-Irvine or the University of Washington by mating Gclm+/− males with Gclm+/− females. Offspring were genotyped by PCR using primers for both the native Gclm sequence and the β-Geo sequence on DNA extracted from tail or toe snips as previously described (Giordano et al., 2006). The mice were group housed with male littermates in American Association for the Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care–accredited facilities, with free access to deionized water and soy-free laboratory chow, on a 14:10 h light-dark cycle (UC Irvine) or on a 12:12 h light-dark cycle (University of Washington). Temperature was maintained at 21°C–23°C. The experimental protocols were carried out in accordance with the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (National Research Council, 1996) and were approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee at the respective institution.

Male fertility assessment. At 8 months of age Gclm+/+ or Gclm−/− male mice were mated to female C57BL/6Crl mice from Charles River Laboratories (8 weeks old) on the afternoon of proestrus, determined by vaginal cytology. Females were assessed the next morning for vaginal plugs, and the day of plug was designated embryonic day 1 (E1). Pregnancy was further confirmed by at least 7 days of leukocytic vaginal cytology. Each male was initially mated with two females, with at least a 4-day rest between matings. If a female had a nonovigravid uterus despite vaginal cytology consistent with pregnancy, the male was mated with another female. Litter size was assessed at E18. Live and dead fetuses and resorption sites were counted, and fetuses were weighed. All uteri were then stained in 10% ammonium sulfide for 4 h and checked again for additional resorption sites (Narotsky et al., 1997). The means of the numbers of live pups, dead pups, resorption sites, gravid uterine weights, and fetal weights for the two pregnant females per male were calculated and used for statistical analyses and data presentation. Data from a preliminary study of three Gclm−/− and three Gclm+/+ males in which only live and dead fetuses and resorption sites were enumerated were included in the analyses of those variables.

Glutathione assays. For glutathione assays, testes and epididymides from 2- and 10-month-old males were homogenized in 20 mM Tris, 1 mM EDTA, 250 mM sucrose, 2 mM t-serine, 20 mM boric acid (TES-SB) (White et al., 2003). After removal of aliquots for protein assay and glutamate cysteine ligase assay, supernatants were acidified with one-quarter volume 5% sulfosalicylic acid for glutathione assays (Tsai-Turton and Luderer, 2005). After incubation on ice and centrifugation at 15,800 × g at 4°C, supernatants were removed and stored at −80°C. Total and oxidized glutathione were measured in testicular and epididymal supernatants using a modification of an enzymatic recycling assay developed by Griffith (Griffith, 1998; Luderer et al., 2001; Tsai-Turton and Luderer, 2005). For measurement of GSSG, reduced GSH was first removed from the sample by conjugation with 2-vinylpyridine, followed by chloroform extraction. For both GSH and GSSG assays, triplicates of samples or standards were combined with 33 μl metal-free water and incubated for 10 min at 30°C. The samples were then mixed with 140 μl of 0.3 mM NADPH,
20 μl of 6nM 5,5′-dithiobis(2-nitrobenzoic acid) (DTNB), and 2 μl of 50 U/ml GSH reductase. The rate of thiolbis(2-nitrobenzoic acid) (TNB) formation from DTNB is proportional to the total GSH concentration in each sample. TNB formation was monitored by measuring the absorbance at 412 nm for 5 min every 10 s using a microplate spectrophotometer ( Molecular Devices, Sunnyvale, CA). The concentrations of total GSH or GSSG in the samples were calculated from a standard curve generated from the slopes of the standards. The concentration of reduced GSH was calculated as [total GSH] = 2 × [GSSG].

**Antioxidant enzyme activities.** For GCL, glutathione peroxidase and glutathione reductase enzymatic activity assays, tests, or epididymides from 2- and 10-month-old males were homogenized in 5 μl TESSB/mg tissue. After centrifugation at 15,800 × g at 4°C, supernatants were removed and stored at −80°C. The enzymatic activity of GCL was measured in supernatants of testicular and epididymal homogenates according to the method of White and coworkers (Tsai-Turton and Luderer, 2005; White et al., 2003). Briefly, tissue homogenates and standards containing known concentrations of GSH were preincubated with reaction cocktail containing glutamate, adenosine tri-phosphate, boric acid, EDTA, serine, and magnesium chloride. The reaction was started by the addition of cysteine to each tube. After 20 min, the reaction was stopped by acidification with sulfosalicylic acid. After centrifugation, supernatants were pipetted into a 96-well microplate, and naphthalenedicarboxaldehyde was added for fluorescence detection of glutathione using a BioTek fluorescence spectrophotometer microplate reader (Winooski, VT).

The glutathione peroxidase enzymatic activity in sample supernatants was measured using tert-butyl hydroperoxide (1.2nM) as a substrate in the presence of 0.25 U/ml glutathione reductase, 0.15mM NADPH, and 1mM GSH by monitoring the rate of oxidation of NADPH spectrophotometrically at 340 nm every 10 s for 5 min using a VersaMax tunable microplate spectrophotometer ( Molecular Devices) (Flohe and Günzler, 1984; Vernet et al., 2004). The glutathione reductase enzymatic activity was measured as the rate of oxidation of NADPH as GSGS is reduced by glutathione reductase ( Delides et al., 1976; Kaneko et al., 2001). Briefly, homogenates or standards of glutathione reductase from Baker’s yeast ( Sigma) were pipetted into a 96-well plate. Reaction mixture of NADPH in 100mM potassium phosphate, 1mM EDTA buffer was then added to each well resulting in a final concentration of 0.153mM NADPH. The reaction was initiated by the addition of GSSG in potassium phosphate, EDTA buffer to a final concentration of 1mM GSSG. Negative control wells received buffer without GSSG. Absorbance at 340 nm was monitored as for the glutathione peroxidase assay.

**Testosterone assays.** Blood was collected by cardiac puncture after carbon dioxide euthanasia. Serum was separated by centrifugation after clotting at room temperature and was stored at −20°C. The Coat-A-Count Total Testosterone radioimmunoassay kit from Siemens Medical Solutions Diagnostics (formerly DPC, Los Angeles, CA) was used to measure testosterone concentrations. Samples were run in duplicate, except in a few cases in which there was insufficient serum. The intraassay coefficients of variation (CVs) were 1.3 and 1.6% and the interassay CV was 1.4%.

**Effect of Gclm genotype on testicular toxicity of in utero treatment with benzo[α]pyrene.** Breeding pairs of Gclm+/− females and males were set up in the late afternoon. The day of vaginal plug detection in the female was designated gestational day (GD) 1. Dams were treated by oral gavage with 2 or 10 mg/kg BaP (Sigma-Aldrich Supelco, ≥99.8% purity) in sesame oil daily from GD7 to GD16. Control animals were gavaged with the same volume of sesame oil alone. The experiment was carried out in two blocks. In the first block, pregnant mice were dosed with 0 or 10 mg/kg BaP (experiment 1), and in the second block, mice were dosed with 0 or 2 mg/kg BaP (experiment 2). The dosing regimens were based on a previous study in CD-1 mice, which showed that male offspring treated from GD7 to GD16 with 10 mg/kg had reduced fertility compared with controls, whereas males treated with higher doses were completely infertile ( MacKenzie and Angevine, 1981). The following safety precautions were followed when handling BaP because it is a known carcinogen: BaP dosing solutions were prepared in a designated chemical fume hood by personnel wearing double gloves, impermeable sleeve covers, safety glasses, and disposable gown. Gavage dosing of animals was performed in a hood by personnel wearing double gloves and disposable gowns. All personal protective equipment, dosing equipment, other supplies potentially contaminated with BaP, and soiled bedding from cages of treated mice were sealed in plastic bags and disposed of as hazardous waste.

Dams were allowed to deliver. Male pups were weaned at 21 days of age and were killed by carbon dioxide asphyxiation at 10 weeks of age. Testes and epididymides were rapidly dissected out and weighed. One testis and epididymis from each animal were used for sperm counts. The other testis and epididymides were processed for histology.

**Assessment of sperm counts, motility, and morphology.** Testicular sperm head counts, cauda epididymal sperm counts, and sperm motility assessment were performed according to published methods (Blazak et al., 1993; Chapin et al., 1985; Dunnick et al., 1986; Filler, 1993; Revel et al., 2001). The tests and epididymides were dissected out, cleaned of adherent fat, and weighed. The cauda epididymis was dissected from the corpus epididymis, weighed, and then rapidly minced in 500 μl prewarmed PBS at 37°C. A 10 μl aliquot was removed, spread onto a slide, allowed to dry, fixed in 5% acetic acid in ethanol, and stained with 5% eosin Y for sperm morphology. The remaining minced cauda epididymis was incubated for 15 min at 37°C, allowing sperm to swim into the buffer. An equal volume of 4% paraformaldehyde in PBS was then added to fix the sperm, and epididymal sperm counts were enumerated using a hemacytometer. Testes were frozen on dry ice and stored at −80°C. For testicular sperm head counts, testes were thawed on ice, each testis was minced, then homogenized in 8 ml of 0.9% sodium chloride, 0.05% Triton X-100 for 2 min at high speed on ice using an Omni Tissue Homogenizer and allowed to settle for at least 1 min. Sperm heads in the homogenate were counted using a hemacytometer.

**Testicular and epididymal histology.** Testes and epididymides were fixed in Bouin’s fixative at 4°C overnight, followed by washing four times in 50% ethanol, and storage in 70% ethanol until processing for routine histology and staining with Periodic Acid Schiff and hematoxylin (testes) or hematoxylin and eosin (epididymides). Histological sections from each animal were evaluated without knowledge of genotype or treatment group. For quantification of seminiferous tubule defects, images of two testicular cross-sections were captured per animal. The total number of seminiferous tubule cross-sections was counted, and each cross-section was scored for vacuolization by one of the investigators (U.L.). The percentages of tubule cross-sections with vacuolization were calculated and used for data presentation and statistical analyses. The epididymides were evaluated by a board-certified veterinary pathologist (G.W.L.).

**Statistical analyses.** The effects of Gclm genotype on body and testis weights, testicular morphometry, sperm counts, ROS, antioxidant enzyme activities, and glutathione were analyzed by independent samples t-test for equal or unequal variances as appropriate. The effects of Gclm genotype and BaP treatment on organ weights and sperm parameters were analyzed using generalized linear models with BaP dose, Gclm genotype, BaP × genotype interaction modeled as fixed effects, and body weight included as a covariate. In order to adjust for litter effects, litter number was entered into the model as a subject effect. If the overall analysis showed statistically significant effects of BaP dose and/or Gclm genotype, then intergroup comparisons were conducted using t-tests on the litter means. Data expressed as proportions, such as the fraction of motile sperm, were arc sine square root transformed prior to analyses (Pastermack and Shore, 1982). Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 18.0 for MacIntosh.
TABLE 1
Effects of Lack of Gclm on Testicular and Epididymal GCL, GPX, and GR Enzymatic Activities (Mean ± SEM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gclm+/+</th>
<th>Gclm−/−</th>
<th>Gclm+/+</th>
<th>Gclm−/−</th>
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<tr>
<td>Testis</td>
<td>Epididymis</td>
<td>Testis</td>
<td>Epididymis</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCL (nmol GSH/mg protein/min)</td>
<td>2.94 ± 0.64</td>
<td>0.88 ± 0.04</td>
<td>1.66 ± 0.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>GR (mU/mg protein)</td>
<td>37.4 ± 1.3</td>
<td>38.5 ± 1.7</td>
<td>45.1 ± 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPX (mU/mg protein)</td>
<td>17.6 ± 1.0</td>
<td>16.2 ± 1.0</td>
<td>40.7 ± 2.3</td>
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Note. n = 4–7 per group.

*p < 0.05 versus Gclm+/+.

*p ≤ 0.001 versus Gclm+/+.

RESULTS

Gclm Deletion Results in Greatly Decreased Testicular and Epididymal GCL Enzymatic Activity and GSH Concentrations

As expected, Gclm−/− males had significantly decreased GCL enzymatic activity in testes (p < 0.05) and epididymides (p < 0.001) to 30 and 57% of wild-type levels, respectively (Table 1). Decreased GCL enzymatic activity resulted in greatly diminished testicular and epididymal total GSH and GSSG concentrations in Gclm−/− males compared with wild-type littermates. In 2-month-old Gclm−/− males, testicular GSH concentrations were 39% of wild-type levels and epididymal GSH concentrations were 19% of wild-type levels (p < 0.002 effect of genotype by t-test; Fig. 1A). GSSG concentrations were even more decreased than total GSH in 2-month-old Gclm−/− testes and epididymides to 25 and 13%, respectively, of wild-type levels (p < 0.009 effect of genotype by t-test; Fig. 1B). As a result of the relatively greater decrease in GSSG, the ratio of reduced GSH (rGSH) to GSSG was significantly increased in the testes (p = 0.029) and nonsignificantly increased in the epididymides (p = 0.309) of null males compared with wild-type males, indicating a more reduced state despite the diminished total GSH concentrations (Fig. 1C). In 10-month-old Gclm−/− male testes, total GSH concentrations were more decreased relative to wild-type testes than in 2-month-old male testes, to about 16% of wild-type levels (Fig. 1A; p < 0.001), and epididymal GSH concentrations were decreased to 20% of wild-type levels (p < 0.001). The ratios of rGSH to GSSG were significantly increased in Gclm−/− compared with Gclm+/+ testes and nonsignificantly increased in Gclm−/− epididymides at 10 months of age (Fig. 1C).

Effect of Gclm Deletion on Testicular and Epididymal Glutathione Peroxidase (GPX) and Glutathione Reductase (GSR) Enzymatic Activities

Because the testicular and epididymal rGSH to GSSG ratios were increased in Gclm−/− males relative to wild-type males, we investigated the effects of Gclm deletion on the activities of the enzymes involved in glutathione oxidation and reduction, GPX and GSR. Testicular GSR and GPX activities did not differ significantly between Gclm−/− and Gclm+/+ males (Table 1). Epididymal GSR activity was statistically significantly increased by 1.4-fold in Gclm−/− males relative to wild-type males (p = 0.001; Table 1). Epididymal GPX activity did not differ by genotype.

Fertility of Gclm−/− Males Is Normal

Eight-month-old males were mated to two wild-type C57BL/6 females each (8 weeks old), with at least a 4-day rest between matings. The fraction of matings that resulted in vaginal plugs, the fraction of plugged females with gravid uteri, and the fraction of females that were pregnant by vaginal cytology but had nongravid uteri did not differ by male genotype (Table 2). The numbers of live fetuses, dead fetuses, resorption sites, total implantation sites, and fetal weights per litter also did not differ by male genotype (Table 2).

Serum Testosterone Concentrations Unaffected by Gclm Genotype

Serum testosterone concentrations did not differ significantly among 2-month-old Gclm+/+ (1.92 ± 1.19 ng/ml; n = 10) and Gclm−/− (1.68 ± 1.25 ng/ml; n = 10) males or 10-month-old Gclm+/+ (0.94 ± 0.49 ng/ml; n = 6) and Gclm−/− (2.18 ± 1.43 ng/ml; n = 8) males.

Testicular and Epididymal Weights and Sperm Counts in Gclm−/− Males

Although Gclm−/− males weighed about 1.5 g less on average than their wild-type littermates at 2 months (p = 0.03, t-test) and 3.6 g less at 10 months (p = 0.11), testicular weights did not differ significantly between the genotypes at 2 or 10 months of age (Table 3). Epididymal weights were significantly lower in Gclm−/− than in wild-type males at 2 and 10 months, but this difference disappeared when epididymal weights were adjusted for body weights (Table 3). Testicular sperm head counts did not differ significantly by genotype in 2- (Fig. 2, control groups in BaP experiment below) or 10-month-old males (Table 4). Cauda epididymal sperm counts did not differ significantly by genotype in 10-month-old males (Table 4), but cauda epididymal sperm counts were decreased in 2-month-old Gclm−/− males compared with Gclm+/+ males (Fig. 3D, control group in experiment 2). Cauda epididymal sperm morphology did not differ significantly by genotype in 10-month-old males (Table 4). The apparent trend toward Gclm−/− males having higher percentages of immature sperm (sperm with cytoplasmic droplets) was not statistically significant (p = 0.16).

Gclm−/− Male Conceptions Are More Sensitive to Disruption of Spermatogenesis by In Utero Exposure to BaP Than Are Gclm+/+ Males

Gclm+/− females were mated with Gclm+/− males, and females were treated by oral gavage with 0 or 10 mg/kg BaP...
from GD7 to GD16 (experiment 1) or with 0 or 2 mg/kg BaP from GD7 to GD16 (experiment 2). The two experiments were conducted 2 years apart. Statistical comparison of various endpoints in the Gclm+/+ control offspring revealed significantly higher epididymal sperm counts and lower epididymal sperm motility in the control wild-type males from experiment 2 compared with experiment 1. Therefore, the sperm count data from the two experiments were analyzed separately.

BaP exposure in utero did not significantly affect body weight of male offspring in either experiment, but Gclm−/−
males weighed about 2–3 g less than wild-type males (p < 0.002, effect of genotype).

There was a striking effect of 10 mg/kg BaP treatment on unadjusted testis weight (data not shown) and testis weight as a fraction of body weight (Table 5) (p < 0.001, effect of BaP) and a lesser effect of 2 mg/kg BaP on adjusted testis weight (p = 0.017, effect of BaP) but not unadjusted testis weight (p = 0.166). In the 10 mg/kg BaP-treated males, but not the vehicle controls, the unadjusted testis weights (p = 0.019, intergroup comparison by t-test) and adjusted testis weights (p = 0.058, intergroup comparison) were lower in the Gclm−/− than in the Gclm+/+ males, and the interaction between BaP treatment and genotype was statistically significant for adjusted testis weights (p = 0.005). This indicates a greater effect of gestational BaP treatment on Gclm−/− male testis weights than on Gclm+/+ males. Unadjusted (data not shown) and adjusted (Table 5) epididymal weights were also significantly decreased in 10 mg/kg BaP-treated males (p < 0.001, effect of treatment) but not in 2 mg/kg BaP-treated males (p = 0.261 and p = 0.050, respectively). In experiment 2, adjusted and unadjusted (data not shown) epididymal weights were significantly lower in the Gclm−/− males (p < 0.001, effect of genotype); unadjusted epididymal weight (data not shown) was also significantly decreased in experiment 1 (p < 0.001), but there was no effect of genotype on adjusted epididymal weight in experiment 1 (p = 0.288) (Table 5).

Total homogenization resistant sperm heads per testis decreased in 10 mg/kg BaP-treated males (p < 0.001, effect of treatment) and in 2 mg/kg BaP-treated males in (p = 0.022) (Fig. 2). The effect of genotype on total sperm heads per milligram testis was not statistically significant in either experiment. Intergroup comparisons showed that total sperm heads per testis were fewer in the 10 mg/kg BaP-treated Gclm−/− males than in the Gclm+/+ males (p = 0.013), but there was no significant difference between the Gclm−/− and the Gclm+/+ 0 mg/kg controls. When testicular sperm counts were expressed per milligram testis, neither the effect of BaP treatment nor the effect of genotype was statistically significant, but the interaction between genotype and BaP dose was statistically significant in experiment 1 (p = 0.049), due to a decrease in the Gclm−/−, but not in the Gclm+/+, males. Together, these results suggest that Gclm−/− males are more sensitive to the testicular toxicity of gestational exposure to BaP than are Gclm+/+ males.

Cauda epididymal sperm counts were reduced, both as total sperm per cauda epididymis and sperm per milligram cauda epididymis, in 10 mg/kg BaP-treated males (p < 0.001, effect of treatment) and in 2 mg/kg BaP-treated males (p ≤ 0.053) compared with 0 mg/kg controls (Fig. 3). The interaction between BaP dose and genotype was statistically significant in experiment 1 (p ≤ 0.006); in the 10 mg/kg BaP-treated males in experiment 1, the sperm count per cauda epididymis was significantly lower by 88% in the Gclm−/− than in the Gclm+/+ males (p = 0.022 by t-test), whereas the sperm per cauda did not differ by genotype in the vehicle controls. These results are consistent with a greater sensitivity of the Gclm−/− males to the effects of gestational BaP treatment on epididymal sperm counts. In contrast, in experiment 2, the numbers of sperm per cauda epididymis were 31% lower in 2 mg/kg BaP-treated Gclm−/− males compared with 2 mg/kg BaP-treated Gclm+/+ males and 35% lower in 0 mg/kg BaP-treated

### TABLE 2

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<tr>
<th>Effects of Gclm Genotype on Male Fertility</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gclm+/+ (mean ± SEM)</td>
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<td>Fraction of matings plugged</td>
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<td>Fraction plugged pregnant</td>
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<td>Fraction non-gravid uteri if pregnant by vaginal cytology</td>
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<td>Live fetuses per litter</td>
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<td>Implantation sites per litter</td>
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<td>Mean fetal weight per litter (mg)</td>
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### TABLE 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects of Gclm Genotype on Testicular and Epididymal Weights at 2 and 10 Months of Age</th>
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<td>Genotype</td>
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<td>Gclm+/+</td>
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Note. n = 6–16 per group.

*a p < 0.001.

*p = 0.030, by t-test versus Gclm−/−.
**FIG. 2.** *In utero* exposure to BaP decreases testicular sperm counts to a greater extent in *Gclm−/−* than in *Gclm+/+* males. The graphs show the mean ± SEM of total homogenization resistant sperm heads per testis (A, C) and sperm heads per milligram testis (B, D) by daily dose of BaP to the mother from GD7 to GD16 in experiments 1 (A, B) and 2 (C, D). (A) *p* < 0.001, effect of BaP dose, the effect of genotype (*p* = 0.961), and the genotype × BaP interaction (*p* = 0.250) were not statistically significant. (B) The genotype × BaP interaction was statistically significant (*p* = 0.049); effects of genotype (*p* = 0.741) and BaP (*p* = 0.545) were not statistically significant. (C) The effect of BaP dose was statistically significant (*p* = 0.022). The effects of genotype and BaP × genotype interaction were not statistically significant. (D) No statistically significant effects were observed. Experiment 1, *n* = 6–9 per group from 4 to 6 litters per group. Experiment 2, *n* = 6–14 per group from 6 to 11 litters per group. *Significantly different from *Gclm+/+* with same BaP dose; †significantly different from 0 mg/kg BaP of same genotype, *p* < 0.05 by *t*-test.

*Gclm−/−* males had fewer sperm per cauda epididymis and sperm per milligram cauda in *Gclm−/−* than in *Gclm+/+* males (*p* < 0.010, effect of genotype).

The fraction of motile sperm decreased significantly with 10 mg/kg BaP treatment in experiment 1 (*p* = 0.004, effect of treatment) but not with 2 mg/kg BaP in experiment 2 (Figs. 3A and 3B, lower graphs). In experiment 1, but not experiment 2, there was a statistically significantly lower fraction of motile sperm in the *Gclm−/−* males than in *Gclm+/+* males (*p* < 0.001, effect of genotype).

Cauda epididymal sperm morphology was examined in experiment 2 only. The percentage of sperm with abnormal heads and percentage of sperm with cytoplasmic droplets were significantly decreased in males with *in utero* exposure to BaP (*p* ≤ 0.006, effect of BaP), and *Gclm−/−* males had higher percentages of sperm with abnormal heads (*p* = 0.003, effect of genotype).

### TABLE 4

| **Effects of Gclm Genotype on Testicular Sperm Head Counts and on Cauda Epididymal Sperm Counts and Morphology at 10 Months of Age** |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
|                                 | *Gclm+/+* | *Gclm−/−* |
|                                 | (mean ± SEM) | *n* | (mean ± SEM) | *n* |
| Sperm heads per testis (×10⁶)   | 28.5 ± 1.6 | 6  | 26.7 ± 1.3 | 8  |
| Sperm heads per milligram testis (×10⁵) | 2.6 ± 0.2 | 6  | 2.6 ± 0.1 | 8  |
| Sperm per epididymis (×10⁶)     | 13.8 ± 1.7 | 6  | 13.3 ± 0.6 | 8  |
| Sperm per milligram epididymis (×10⁵) | 11.3 ± 1.3 | 6  | 12.0 ± 0.3 | 8  |
| Percent with abnormal heads     | 6.1 ± 2.5 | 3  | 9.1 ± 0.8 | 6  |
| Percent with abnormal tails     | 5.4 ± 2.0 | 3  | 6.3 ± 1.6 | 6  |
| Percent with cytoplasmic droplet| 3.6 ± 0.9 | 3  | 14.9 ± 6.9 | 6  |
genotype) than \( Gclm^{-/-} \) males (Table 6). The results showed no statistically significant effects of BaP or genotype on percentage of sperm with abnormal tails (Table 6).

**FIG. 3.** In utero exposure to BaP decreases epididymal sperm counts to a greater extent in \( Gclm^{-/-} \) than in \( Gclm^{+/+} \) males. The graphs show the mean ± SEM of sperm per cauda epididymis (A, D), sperm per milligram cauda epididymis (B, E), and fraction motile cauda epididymal sperm (C, F) by daily dose of BaP to the mother from GD7 to GD16. (A) The effects of BaP dose \( (p < 0.001) \) and genotype \( \times \) BaP interaction \( (p = 0.006) \) were statistically significant; the effect of genotype \( (p = 0.397) \) was not statistically significant. (B) The effects of BaP dose \( (p < 0.001) \) and genotype \( \times \) BaP interaction \( (p = 0.001) \) were statistically significant; the effect of genotype \( (p = 0.361) \) was not statistically significant; the effect of genotype \( (p = 0.978) \) was not statistically significant. (D) \( p = 0.035 \), effect of BaP dose; \( p < 0.001 \), effect of genotype; the effect of genotype \( \times \) BaP interaction \( (p = 0.482) \) was not statistically significant. (E) \( p = 0.053 \), effect of BaP dose; \( p = 0.009 \), effect of genotype; the genotype \( \times \) BaP interaction \( (p = 0.413) \) was not statistically significant. Experiment 1, \( n = 6–9 \) per group from 4 to 6 litters per group. Experiment 2, \( n = 6–14 \) per group from 6 to 11 litters per group. *Significantly different from \( Gclm^{+/+} \) with same BaP dose; †significantly different from 0 mg/kg BaP of same genotype, \( p < 0.05 \) by \( t \)-test.

Examination of testicular histology revealed normal spermatogenesis in oil-treated \( Gclm^{-/-} \) and \( Gclm^{+/+} \) males (Figs. 4A and 4B; Table 7). Four of four testes of 10 mg/kg
BaP-treated Gclm−/− males had severe vacuolization of the seminiferous tubules with only Sertoli cells apparent in most tubule cross-sections (Fig. 4F; Table 8). Five of five testes of 10 mg/kg BaP-treated Gclm+/+ males also had many affected tubules (Fig. 4F; Table 8). However, in contrast to the Gclm−/− testes, spermatids and meiotic stages appeared to be present in many affected tubules. The testes of the 2 mg/kg BaP-treated Gclm−/− males had a similar percentage of vacuolated seminiferous tubules as the testes of the 2 mg/kg BaP-treated Gclm+/+ males (Figs. 4C and 4D; Table 7). The effect of BaP dose was statistically significant (p < 0.001 by two-way ANOVA). Intergroup comparisons showed significantly higher percentages of vacuolated seminiferous tubules in the 10 mg/kg BaP-treated Gclm−/− and Gclm+/+ males compared with 0 or 2 mg/kg BaP-treated males of the same genotype. The number of interstitial cells also appeared to be increased in testes of males of both genotypes treated with 10 mg/kg BaP in utero (Figs. 4E and 4F). However, Leydig cell steroidogenesis was not affected by prenatal BaP exposure. There was a nonsignificant trend toward decreased serum testosterone concentrations in the Gclm−/− males (p = 0.088, effect of genotype; Table 8).

Epididymal histology was not affected by Gclm genotype (Fig. 5) or prenatal exposure to 2 mg/kg BaP (data not shown).

**DISCUSSION**

Our results show that decreased testicular and epididymal enzymatic activity of GCL, the rate-limiting enzyme in GSH synthesis, and GSH concentrations in Gclm−/− male mice did not affect fertility, testicular sperm counts, or testicular histology compared with Gclm+/+ males. Gclm deletion was associated with decreased cauda epididymal sperm counts and motility and with increased abnormal sperm morphology, but these effects were not observed in all experiments. In addition, Gclm−/− male embryos were more sensitive to the testicular toxicity of gestational treatment with the PAH BaP. Gclm−/− males exposed to 10 mg/kg/day BaP from GD7 to GD16 had lower testicular and epididymal weights, testicular and

### TABLE 5

**Effects of In Utero Treatment With BaP From GD7 to GD16 and Gclm Genotype on Testicular and Epididymal Weights as Percentages of Body Weight at 10 Weeks of Age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gclm+/+ (mean ± SEM)</th>
<th>Gclm−/− (mean ± SEM)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oil</td>
<td>BaP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paired testis weight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment 1 (10 mg/kg BaP)</td>
<td>0.736 ± 0.033</td>
<td>0.262 ± 0.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment 2 (2 mg/kg BaP)</td>
<td>0.767 ± 0.023</td>
<td>0.702 ± 0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paired epididymal weight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment 1 (10 mg/kg BaP)</td>
<td>0.237 ± 0.015</td>
<td>0.179 ± 0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment 2 (2 mg/kg BaP)</td>
<td>0.256 ± 0.009</td>
<td>0.239 ± 0.010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 6–9 per group from 4 to 6 litters per group, experiment 1. n = 6–14 per group from 6 to 11 litters per group, experiment 2.*

*p < 0.001, effect of BaP dose; p = 0.602, effect of genotype; p = 0.005, BaP × genotype interaction.*

*p = 0.017, effect of BaP dose; p = 0.257, effect of genotype; p = 0.422, BaP × genotype.*

*p < 0.001, effect of BaP dose; p = 0.288, effect of genotype; p = 0.956, BaP × genotype.*

*p = 0.050, effect of BaP dose; p < 0.001, effect of genotype; p = 0.454, BaP × genotype.*

### TABLE 6

**Effects of Exposure to 2 mg/kg BaP From GD7 to GD16 and Gclm Genotype on Cauda Epididymal Sperm Morphology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gclm+/+ (mean ± SEM)</th>
<th>Gclm−/− (mean ± SEM)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oil</td>
<td>BaP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent sperm with cytoplasmic droplet*</td>
<td>23.5 ± 3.1</td>
<td>19.1 ± 2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent sperm with abnormal heads*</td>
<td>10.6 ± 1.4</td>
<td>8.3 ± 1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent sperm with abnormal tails*</td>
<td>19.4 ± 1.9</td>
<td>20.2 ± 3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 6–9 per group from 5 to 7 litters per group.*

*p < 0.001, effect of BaP dose; p = 0.164, effect of genotype; p = 0.180, BaP × genotype.*

*p = 0.006, effect of BaP dose; p = 0.003, effect of genotype; p = 0.654, BaP × genotype.*

*p = 0.895, effect of BaP dose; p = 0.705, effect of genotype; p = 0.308, BaP × genotype.*
epididymal sperm counts, and epididymal sperm motility than their wild-type, 10mg/kg BaP-exposed littermates.

Gclm deletion decreased testicular and epididymal GSSG concentrations to a greater extent than total GSH concentrations, resulting in significantly higher (more reduced) rGSH to GSSG ratios in the testis. Although epididymal enzymatic activity of GSR was significantly increased, the increased rGSH to GSSG ratio in the testis remains unexplained, as testicular GSR and GPX activities were not altered. This contrasts with previous observations that the rGSH to GSSG ratios in liver, kidney, pancreas, and erythrocytes did not differ between Gclm−/− and Gclm+/+ mice (Yang et al., 2002) or were decreased in plasma and livers of Gclm−/− mice (Kendig et al., 2011) and suggests that there may be compensatory protective mechanisms in the testis that protect against potential adverse effects of low GSH concentrations on spermatogenesis.

Deletion of Gclm alone did not affect male fertility or testicular spermatogenesis. In contrast, deletion of the transcription factor Nrf2, which regulates the transcription of numerous antioxidant genes, including Gclm, Gclc, and several GSTs, adversely affected spermatogenesis (Nakamura et al., 2010). Nrf2 null mice had normal testicular sperm counts and histology as young adults but developed an age-associated decline in spermatogenesis that was already apparent by 4 months of age (Nakamura et al., 2010). In the present study, we observed no difference in sperm parameters or fertility between 8- and 10-month-old Gclm−/− and Gclm+/+ males.

FIG. 4. Dose-dependent seminiferous tubule damage after in utero exposure to BaP in Gclm−/− and Gclm+/+ males. Images show Periodic Acid Schiff and Hematoxylin-stained cross-sections of testes from 10-week-old Gclm−/− and Gclm+/+ male mice exposed to BaP or oil vehicle in utero as in Figure 2. (A) Gclm+/+ male exposed to 0 mg/kg/day BaP. (B) Gclm−/− male exposed to 0 mg/kg/day BaP. (C) Gclm+/+ male exposed to 2 mg/kg/day BaP. (D) Gclm−/− male exposed to 2 mg/kg/day BaP. (E) Gclm+/+ male exposed to 10 mg/kg/day BaP. (F) Gclm−/− male exposed to 10 mg/kg/day BaP. Original magnification for all images, ×200.
Although Nrf2−/− males had modestly decreased testicular and epididymal GSH concentrations (Nakamura et al., 2010), the lack of a similar age-associated decline in spermatogenesis in Gclm−/− mice suggests that the testicular phenotype of the Nrf2 null mice is not primarily caused by the effects of Nrf2 deletion on GSH synthesis. Mice null for γ-glutamyl transpeptidase 1 (Ggt1) displayed a shortened lifespan, stunted growth, and a severe male reproductive phenotype, with complete infertility, decreased testis size with reduced seminiferous tubule diameter despite normal development of somatic and spermatogenic cells, severely decreased epididymal sperm counts and motility, and low FSH and testosterone levels (Kumar et al., 2000; Lieberman et al., 1996; Will et al., 2000). GGT catalyzes the cleavage of GSH into cysteinyl γ-glutamate, an essential step in the γ-glutamyl cycle that helps to maintain cellular levels of cysteine and GSH. Ggt1 null mice had decreased testicular cysteine concentrations, but normal testicular GSH concentrations, compared with wild-type controls, and the male reproductive phenotype was completely rescued by cysteine replacement (Kumar et al., 2000). These findings together with the results of the present study, which showed minimal effects of pronounced GSH depletion on male reproduction, provide strong evidence that the male reproductive effects of Ggt1 deletion are caused by cysteine deficiency and not by GSH deficiency.

In contrast to the lack of an effect of Gclm deletion on the testis, epididymal function appeared to be modestly affected by lack of Gclm. Unadjusted epididymal weights were consistently significantly lower in Gclm−/− males than in Gclm+/+ males, but adjustment for body weight attenuated or abolished this effect. Although no epididymal histological abnormalities were noted, decreased cauda epididymal sperm counts and motility and increased abnormal sperm morphology were inconsistently observed among experiments in Gclm−/− males. A number of redox-sensitive processes are important for sperm activation and acquisition of forward motility. Activation of spermatogenic cell-specific Type 1 hexokinase (HK1S) is necessary for the acquisition of motility and is mediated by cleavage of disulfide-linked HK1S dimers to active monomers (Nakamura et al., 2008). In contrast, compensatory antioxidant mechanisms in the Gclm−/− sperm may disrupt proper oxidative events necessary for motility. For example, normal levels of the mitochondrial form of Gpx4 are critical for male fertility. GPX4 stabilizes the mitochondrial capsule of the sperm midpiece by oxidation of protein thiols, where low GSH concentrations are normal and permissive of oxidation (Schneider et al., 2009). The impact of Gclm deficiency on these processes is beyond the scope of this study; however, the inconsistency of the observed effects on sperm motility and morphology suggests a complex mechanism of regulation.

Despite the lack of effects of Gclm genotype alone on testicular spermatogenesis, the Gclm−/− male conceptuses were more susceptible to the testicular toxicity of in utero exposure to the PAH BaP. Gclm−/− males exposed prenatally to 10 mg/kg/day BaP had significantly lower testicular sperm head counts, epididymal sperm counts, and testicular and epididymal weights than their wild-type littermates. Testicular histology of the 10 mg/kg/day BaP-exposed Gclm−/− males showed that 81% of seminiferous tubules were vacuolated compared with 65% of tubules in Gclm+/+ males. Most of these tubules were essentially aspermic. Testicular histological changes observed in 10 mg/kg BaP-treated males were more severe than those reported previously for CD-1 males treated with 10 mg/kg BaP during the same gestational interval, resembling those observed in CD-1 males exposed to 40 mg/kg (MacKenzie and Angevine, 1981) and suggesting that the C57BL/6J strain is more sensitive to the transplacental testicular toxicity of BaP than the CD-1 strain. C57BL/6 female mice have been reported to be more sensitive than other strains to PAH ovarian toxicity (Takizawa et al., 1984). An alternative explanation for the increased sensitivity of male embryos to the transplacental testicular toxicity of BaP in the current study is that haploinsufficiency of the Gclm+/− dams may modify the effects of BaP in the offspring. This could be tested in the future by transferring fertilized eggs from Gclm+/− x Gclm+/− matings into C57BL/6J pseudopregnant female mice and examining the testes and epididymides of the male offspring.

### Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BaP dose (mg/kg/day)</th>
<th>Percent vacuolated seminiferous tubules ± SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Gclm+/+</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.8 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.5 ± 5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>65.3 ± 8.8&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Significantly different from 0 mg/kg group of same genotype by post hoc Dunnett’s T3 test.

<sup>b</sup>Significantly different from 2 mg/kg group of same genotype by post hoc Dunnett’s T3 test.

### Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BaP dose (mg/kg/day)</th>
<th>Testosterone, ng/ml (n) (mean ± SEM)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Gclm+/+</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.25 ± 1.56 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.18 ± 1.99 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.27 ± 2.73 (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
females, followed by BaP treatment and assessment of the offspring. Our findings are relevant to humans. The PAH 9,10-dimethyl-1,2-benzanthracene has previously been shown to induce apoptosis of germ cells in cultured human fetal testis via an arylhydrocarbon receptor–dependent pathway (Coutts et al., 2007). In addition, polymorphisms in Gclm and Gclc, which affect GSH synthesis, exist in humans (Le et al., 2010; Nakamura et al., 2002, 2003; Nichenametla et al., 2008; Walsh et al., 2001; Willis et al., 2003). Our data lead us to hypothesize that these polymorphisms may modulate the effects of prenatal exposure to PAHs on male offspring.

The increased sensitivity of the Gclm−/− embryonic testis to BaP may be due to decreased ability to detoxify reactive metabolites of BaP and/or ROS produced as a result of BaP metabolism. GSH conjugation is an important phase II detoxification mechanism for the diol epoxide metabolites (Jernström et al., 1996; Romert et al., 1989; Seidel et al., 1998) and for the arene oxide and quinone metabolites of PAHs (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, 1995). Cytochromes P450 1A1, 1A2, and 1B1 are the major P450 enzymes involved in the metabolic activation of BaP (Kleiner et al., 2004; Xue and Warshawsky, 2005). Expression of most cytochrome P450 metabolizing enzymes remains low until after birth, with the exception of induction of embryonic Cyp1a1 expression in the liver and lung by exposure to PAHs as early as GD12.5 in the mouse (Dey et al., 1989; Rich and Boobis, 1997). Dey et al. (1989) did not observe constitutive or inducible Cyp1a1 expression in other organs, presumably including the developing testis. Therefore, electrophilic reactive intermediates of BaP likely play a limited role in the testicular developmental toxicity of BaP. Previous work by Wells et al. (2005, 2009) has shown that embryos constitutively express prostaglandin-endoperoxide synthase 1 and 2, that prostaglandin-endoperoxide synthases can bioactivate BaP to free radical intermediates that initiate ROS formation, that gestational treatment with BaP increases embryonic oxidative protein and DNA damage, and that antioxidants are protective against teratogenesis caused by BaP (Parman and Wells, 2002; Winn and Wells, 1997). Although Wells and coworkers did not examine developmental toxicity to the reproductive system, our findings of increased sensitivity of GSH-deficient male embryos to in utero testicular toxicity of BaP provide further support for a role for oxidative stress in the developmental toxicity of BaP.

In conclusion, although deletion of Gclm greatly decreased GCL enzymatic activity and GSH concentrations in testes and epididymides, the GSH redox state was more reduced in Gclm−/− testes. Deletion of Gclm alone did not affect male fertility, testicular histology, testicular weights, or testicular sperm head counts. We observed some evidence of an effect of Gclm deletion alone on epididymal function, with inconsistently decreased cauda epididymal sperm counts and motility and increased abnormal sperm morphology among experiments. Gclm−/− male embryos were more sensitive to the
transplacental testicular toxicity of BaP, with greater decreases in testicular and epididymal weights and testicular and epididymal sperm counts than Gclm+/+ littermates. These data demonstrate an important role of embryonic GSH in protecting the developing male reproductive system against PAH-induced toxicity. Future studies should investigate the potential for polymorphisms in human GCLC and GCLM to modulate sensitivity to PAH developmental toxicity.

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